

I'm Not Okay and it's Not Alright by RileyBrody

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Summary: Steve is almost completely sure that he isn't the culprit of Billy's bruises and cuts.

1. I find it kinda funny I find it kinda s

"He's gonna be so pissed when he wakes up."

"Yeah. I know."

"So how are we stopping the psycho from killing us all?"

Steve rubbed the back of his neck, forcing himself to try and think of a solution. Billy was out cold, but it was likely that when he woke up Steve was likely to get another beating, which obviously wasn't a favourable idea.

"We could tie him up?" Max suggested, eyes scanning the room for something to bind her step brother's hands.

"That just looks a little psychotic, doesn't it?" Mike commented. Steve merely shrugged, it wasn't like they had abundances of other options. With a heavy sigh Steve started barking out orders.

"Max, find some bleach and something to tie him up with. Dustin, Lucas and Mike, help me move him." Dragging Billy over to a chair and lifting him up was like trying to drag a car, the teen was pure muscle and when unconscious said muscles became weights. Steve's head still pounded from his earlier beating, all the added effort however had it throbbing, it felt as if his skull was going to concave in yet here he was, the one who had to be responsible for all these kids. Steve just silently prayed that Billy wouldn't wake up whilst they were moving him, it was likely the kids would get hurt in that scenario. Eventually they managed to restrain Billy on a chair, catching their breath they all took a step back and examined his slumped figure.

"Guess we better wake him up then." Steve muttered as he poured a small bit of bleach onto a cloth. He approached the unconscious teen and placed the strong odour under his nose. With one sharp inhale he awoke almost instantly and began to fight against the restraints.

"What the fuck? Why am I tied up?!" He half yelled, the familiar look of anger washing across his face.

"I didn't particularly want my ass to get beat again when you woke up."

"So, what? You tie me up after drugging me? Because that's not messed up."

"Probably equates trying to beat up a 12-year-old." Steve snapped back. Billy simply spat out what remained of blood from his mouth, eyes not flickering away from his glare once.

"You remember what I said?" Max asked, voice wavering ever so slightly. Billy scoffed before turning his glare to his step sister.

"To leave you and your friends alone? Yeah, I got it. Now untie me?" They weren't the sincerest sounding of words but then again, Steven couldn't imagine Billy becoming anymore tame than that. He nodded at the blonde before approaching him. He hesitantly untied his legs first, half expecting a knee to the face, yet none came. He then moved on to the hand restraints, leaning right over Billy. He was overly aware of just how close he was to the guy who had nearly killed him merely a couple hours ago. He could feel Billy's warm breaths through his bloodied shirt, hitting his chest; it was a horrible feeling. The way all his hair stood on end and a weird energy flowed through him, it just made him cringe. The hand restraints didn't come undone soon enough and Steve quickly backed away, standing in front of the kids defensively. All eyes were glued to Billy as he rubbed his wrists and stood up slowly. He glared at Steve for probably the millionth time that day and Steve was getting used to it at this point. His eyes softened only the tiniest fraction before turning to Max.

"We have to go. Now." He commanded.

"You're crazy if you think I'm gonna let her go with you." Steve scoffed. Billy opened his mouth to argue with anger back in his eyes but instead calmed ever so slightly and spoke to Max again.

"Please. He's mad..." The words seemed to have an effect on Max as she took a couple steps toward her step brother.

"It's fine. My mom is probably worried by now." She admitted. Billy said nothing as he turned on his heel and stormed out, slamming the

door. Max glanced around apologetically before hugging everyone goodbye, running after her brother at the sound of his engine running.

"We literally fought demo-dogs and closed the gates of hell today, however, that's the weirdest thing I've seen today." Dustin retorted, earning an almost silent giggle from Lucas.

Rumours of the fight circulated around the school very fast, people connecting the dots of Steve's black eyes, excessive swelling and Billy's busted lip and crooked nose; all without the real details of course. The wildest rumour Steve had heard was that Billy had tried to sleep with Nancy which led to a fight where Steve got his ass handed to him. It was obvious that he couldn't really reveal the story to anyone without any major questions being asked so he chose to merely ignore all the questions. Nancy of course had tried to dote on him out of sympathy and guilt, but he couldn't quite stand to be near her just yet, not without feeling like a wounded puppy anyway.

Since the fight Steve had done everything within his power to avoid the more aggressive boy, only seeing him in gym class and what few other classes they shared. Even when in close proximity of each other Billy said nothing; he was still a complete dick during practise but at least when Steve got knocked over there was no cruel words or uncomfortable shower talks to accompany the ache. In fact, Steve never saw Billy in the shower room. The ending of gym was signalled with the sweet sound of a bell that let the boys head home after a long practise. All the boys jogged towards the locker room excitedly, adrenaline not fully gone just yet however the coach had called over to Steve, asking him to stay behind.

"Whats going on Harrington?" he asked although it seemed that he didn't really care for the answer.

"Nothing Coach, why?"

"Just wondering why your games been so off recently. Keep like this and I'm gonna have to bench you." He stated, expression blank. To say this chat was unexpected would be a complete and utter lie but Steve found himself felt the self-disappointment nonetheless.

"Sorry Coach, I'll do better. I promise." He agreed. The Coach seemed satisfied enough with the answer and sent Steve off to the locker room. Most of the other boys had headed out immediately, opting for a shower at home rather than showering with everyone else. Steve would've done the same, but his parents were away (again) and being alone in the house only offered abundances of opportunities to overthink everything. Grabbing a towel, he headed to the shower room and stripped off. He heard the water already running, meaning someone else had chosen to stay behind but he thought nothing of it. Stood under the water was the familiar mass of muscles, rubbing shampoo through his long blonde locks. To say Steve was slightly anxious about being alone with that lunatic was a major understatement but he hung up his towel and approached one of the showerheads. At first Billy completely ignored his existence, continuing to clean himself in complete silence. How awkward the situation was ran through Steve's head over and over again, making him wish that he was literally anywhere else in the universe, even the upside down sounded appealing in that moment. After a lot of resisting he couldn't help but gliding his eyes over Billy's torso; it was bruised all over, black and blue, highlighter with grazes every now and then. At first thought Steve felt bad, not realising how badly he had injured the other boy. It was odd though. He ever remembered hitting Billy in the ribs. He must've done so badly, after all, Steve's bruises were yellowing, threatening to fade away any second yet Billy's looked brand new. Unless they were? But *who*?

"Take a polaroid, it'll last longer." Billy muttered, pulling Steve out of whatever trance he was in which instantly sent a tidal wave of embarrassment onto his cheeks.

"Sorry, uh, I was just-" he stuttered. "How'd you get those bruises? I thought I only punched you in the face..." Billy looked instantly uncomfortable with the words. It was as if Steve had hit a nerve which only unsettled him, regretting even asking.

"Don't flatter yourself Harrington, you couldn't mark me up like this in your dreams." Billy retorted, the tinge of humour in his words clearly covering for something.

"Well I gave you that black eye, didn't I?" Steve snapped back. Billy merely chuckled at the words. He switched his own water off before

patting Steve on the shoulder.

"Stay out of business that isn't yours, yeah?" and with those words, Billy was gone.

No matter what Steve did he couldn't get the bruising out of his mind. There was something odd behind them, he couldn't shake the feeling that something sinister was going on. After heading home to do homework Steve was thankful to get call from Mrs. Henderson asking if he wouldn't mind babysitting the kids whilst they played Dudgeons and Dragons whilst she worked a late shift at work. He was glad for the distraction from the empty house and loud thoughts that come with it, plus he'd grown very fond of all the kids, especially Dustin.

Upon arriving at the house, he found himself being dragged into the kid's game. He sat at the table with the boys, Max and El. He didn't understand the rules one slightest bit (neither did El which was somewhat comforting) but Dustin helped him as much as he could. He had to admit, he did really enjoy the game in a really weird way although he'd never admit it to anyone at school. The night flew past seamlessly, excluding the small argument between Lucas and Mike about some spell and before they knew it, it was Nine o'clock and Dustin's mom had returned. Joyce drove by to pick up Will and El, the boys remaining then cycled off home, leaving just Dustin, Max and Steve. He didn't know why he was waiting around, Mrs Henderson had already paid him and relieved him of duty, yet he didn't want to leave till Max did. Time continued to tick on and soon nine turned to nine thirty and still no one had come to pick up Max. Steve couldn't help but notice the concern on her face as she peeked out of the window, searching for a car. She was completely sure that she'd told her brother to pick her up at nine, and nine on the dot, she was also pretty sure that despite being an asshole, it was out of character for Billy to be late. They had no choice but to wait.

It wasn't until quarter to ten that a knock on the door finally came and Steve rushed to open it, why he was so eager he didn't know. Much as expected Billy was stood behind the door but he wasn't his normal self. The black eye Steve had given him was definitely and undeniably darker now. It wasn't just the black eye though, there was a trace of redness around his nostrils, something smeared as if to get

rid of it. Lastly his eyes, completely bloodshot, twinkling with a wetness that definitely wasn't normal for him. He kept his eyes to the ground, not looking at Steve.

"I'm here for Max." He grumbled. Steve flat out ignored that though, his own questions pressing at his tongue.

"What happened? Your eyes look like you've been smoking dope and..." he didn't even know what to question first, Billy looked a complete mess.

"I told you earlier Harrington, stay out of my business." He growled, anger flashing through his eyes.

"I'm not letting you drive home Max if you're high so." Steve stated, arms folded. He could tell Billy wanted to hit him, it was just a repeated situation but surprisingly Billy didn't swing.

"I'm not fucking high. Look, just let me take my fucking sister home. I'm not playing around." Steve opened his mouth to argue but he felt the door open behind him, revealing the small ginger girl. Her expression when he saw Billy sent a shiver down Steve's spine, why did Max look so sad and scared all of a sudden?

"Uh, thanks Steve but it's okay, Billy's cool to drive me home." She said with a forced smile. Steve very much wanted to argue but the two had started already heading to the car. The two hopped in and it was merely seconds before Billy zoomed away with Max.

If the feeling of something sinister was already in Steve's stomach, it had possessed his whole body now.

2. And after everything you put me through

Avoiding Billy very quickly progressed to borderline stalking him. Steve tried to be as near Billy at all times, parking near Billy's usual spot, loitering around the smoking area, taking forever in the locker room. Anything he could do that would assure that he would see Billy. It wasn't full on stalker mode, Steve knew where to draw the line of being creepy, but it must've been obvious to Billy. Steve reminded himself of a thirteen-year-old girl with a crush on the head footballer, following him around and hoping to be seen. Despite constantly being followed, Billy hadn't uttered a single word to Steve, just as it had been before, completely ignoring the other's existence which did frustrate the brunette slightly.

"Steve? Are you even listening to me?" Nancy asked, looking slightly frustrated. Steve glanced down at her, no clue of what she had just said.

"Uh sorry, I zoned out..." he trailed off. His eyes could no longer spot the blonde mass of curls down the hallway, so he was forced to give his attention to Nancy.

"I was saying that there's a party tonight, I really want you to come!" Steve scoffed at the words.

"Why are *you* inviting me to a party?" he asked, not having the slightest intention of going.

"I'm not gonna lie Steve, I barely see you anymore and I'm worried. You never go out." She admitted, eyes wide. Steve hated hearing that Nancy was worrying over him, the breakup still seemed like it was yesterday, and he definitely wasn't over her yet, after all she was his first love. He needed space from her, room to breathe and heal, that couldn't be done by going to parties with her and listening to her worries.

"I'm fine Nancy, I don't need to go to some stupid party. I go out all the time."

"Yeah, to babysit Dustin. Look, you need to hang out with people

your age! Please come Steve." She was basically begging at this point causing Steve to cave in and say yes. He liked to think he had his own free will, that he could tell Nancy no but apparently that was the complete opposite of the truth. Apparently if she said jump he asked how high. When he had reluctantly agreed to go Nancy's, eyes had lit up excitedly and he realised how much he missed that look, or maybe he missed the look on her face she'd get when we found him waiting outside of class, or the smile when he bought her flowers. To be quite honest, the list was endless and there were few expressions of Nancy's that Steve didn't find enchanting. His eyes were glued to her as she headed towards class, a small happy hop in her step. He swore that each time he watched her leave his heart broke into one smaller piece. He ran a hand through his hair and let out a distressed sigh, when the bell rang he headed towards the locker room, Nancy still consuming his brain. It wasn't until he was changed and stood in the basketball court that he remembered all these thoughts of Nancy were completely clouding his fascination with Billy. He couldn't quite figure out which one made him saner. Probably neither.

Practise went by in a flash, as per usual Steve was knocked around, but his chat with his coach lit a fire under his ass and he played with every ounce of energy he had. Before Steve knew it, he was pulling up outside his empty house with the school day far behind him. After shovelling whatever food, he could find in the fridge down his throat he headed up to his room and threw himself onto the bed. Ideally, he should be doing his homework, or downstairs watching the television, or listening to his records but he was exhausted. Not only did his bones ache from a week of hard basketball practice but his mind was also exhausted, thinking of Billy, and then Nancy, and then Billy again was utterly draining. He must've laid there for hours, just thinking everything through in his mind, hoping to make sense of why he was so skittish recently. He could blame it on not quite being over Nancy yet but then that wouldn't explain why he was so interested in Billy. Also, why is he so interested in some guy that kicked his ass? Surely that's just asking to be beaten again. Billy let out a frustrated sigh and sat up in his bed, eyes flickering over to the clock. 8 o'clock, the party started in an hour. To say he didn't want to go was a complete understatement, every fibre of his being just wanted to sink into his couch and watch whatever nonsense was on TV like Dallas or The A Team but a small part of him didn't want to

break his promise to Nancy.

Before he knew it, he was spraying hairspray through his locks, keeping the hair glued up in place just as he liked it. After putting on a leather jacket he looked into the mirror, scrutinising his outfit, wondering if it looked like he was trying too hard. Under the jacket he was only wearing a white t-shirt and jeans, but he couldn't help but feel like Nancy would see that he dressed up. He rolled his eyes at his reflection, growing tired of his own thoughts and headed for the front door. It had already hit Nine, but he was never the type to turn up at the start of a party, it would be dead anyway. He gazed at his car longingly as he walked past the drive and onto the street, he'd be at the party in like five minutes if he drove but instead he was forced to walk half an hour to the house. If he was going to the party he was most definitely going to leave it drunk, he didn't have Nancy to look after anymore.

When he arrived at the party he could hear the music coming through the windows, a few people were scattered across the front lawn, all calling a hello to Steve as he approached the threshold. Inside was just as hellish as he was expecting it to be, rooms full to drunk teenagers either trying to fuck whatever was in sight or drink themselves into a coma. He used to love parties like these, he used to be the Keg king after all but now? He couldn't stand to be there for one more moment. He didn't know what changed him, it was probably Nancy, she changed him in more ways than he was comfortable with. After scouting all the rooms, he determined that Nancy hadn't arrived yet which relaxed him ever so slightly. He headed towards the kitchen where he found the counter covered in punch bowls and beer cans. He reached for a can of beer, not sure he'd be able to stomach the punch, fearing it would remind him of how Nancy had shattered his heart in that bathroom.

He sipped at his drink, until his drink turned into his second, and then his third and then during his fourth Nancy's face suddenly appeared before him.

"You actually came!" She exclaimed excitedly. Steve peered up to see Jonathon in tow, still sticking out like a sore thumb at these kinds of parties. Steve forced a smile to his lips before replying.

"Well I said I would, didn't I?" He couldn't sense how slurred his words had come out, the four beers were definitely starting to get to him. Nancy looked like she was about to lecture him about how tipsy he was; but a loud bang of a door came followed by some cheering. The three turned their gaze to see who had just entered, of course it was Billy, whiskey bottle and cigarette in hand who had just turned up, probably already half smashed. The weirdest wave of excitement went through Steve upon Billy's arrival, like he could finally start having some fun. The commotion soon became old news and Nancy began to engage in some conversation with Steve that he barely listened to, he just stared at her, nodded when needed, agreed when needed and laughed when he needed to. Thankfully Jonathan dragged her away, muttering something about grabbing a drink which Steve was really glad about. He was finishing off his drink when he felt someone come stand next to him.

"I hear stories about you being the keg king, yet I still haven't seen you back it up." Billy said with a smug smile. Steve's mind went back to that Halloween party where Billy had basically said the same thing. Back then he was with Nancy though and couldn't act the way he did before but now, he had no chains to bind him and he was *desperate* to get absolutely wasted.

"Find me a keg and I'll show you." Billy flashed him a smile whilst sliding his tongue across his teeth. Clearly proud of himself for pulling Steve down to his level. The older boy followed Billy through the masses of people through to the back yard which was also overly crowded. People began to cheer as the two stepped out onto the patio, forming a small circle around two kegs. Steve heard people calling things at him like 'go on Steve' as he approached one of the kegs.

"Think you can beat me Harrington?" Steve scoffed at the remark.

"I know I can." Billy flashed another one of his smiles, this one looked a tiny bit more psychotic than the last, but Steve chose to ignore it, already knowing that the blonde was super competitive. The two got ready to do a keg stand, a couple of guys they knew from basketball practise stood around them to keep their legs up as they drank. Steve balanced on his hands, forgetting how hard it was to balance like that atop a keg but it wasn't long till he felt his legs being supported. He

heard the words go and he began to drink. He closed his eyes as he drank and drank like he had never drank before, desperately trying to ignore all the blood rushing to his head. With each gulp he was rapidly running out of air and finding himself in immense discomfort, but still he pushed himself. For some reason his immense concentration blocked out all sound, leaving him just to his thoughts of how long he was going to last, apparently it wasn't long. His eyes snapped open as he gasped for air desperately, moving his legs to signal for the guys to let him down. The circle around him began to cheer relentlessly which turned his gaze to Billy who was already standing there, expression half amazed. Steve had beat him.

Steve didn't understand Billy at all. A couple weeks back the guy had just been an asshole in basketball and then he almost killed him with his bare hands, then after that ignored him, and then they into more verbal fights but now here they were, slumped against a wall drunkenly laughing.

"I don't even know how I lasted that long, I thought I was gonna drown." Steve laughed, most definitely drunk at this point. Billy laughed along with him as he took a cigarette from his packet before offering Steve one.

"I don't smoke." He pointed out with an over exaggerated shake of the head, earning yet another smile.

"Well there's always an opportunity to start." Said Billy with a raised brow. Steve contemplated for a second before remembering that he was drunk and any thoughts he just had were probably bullshit so he took a cigarette. Billy rose his hand slowly, and lit his lighter. He didn't move his hand far and with the cigarette perched on his lips, Steve leant towards Billy, towards the flame. He could smell Billy's cologne mixed with the rough smell of whiskey as he lit the end. He sucked on the filter, eyes locked on Billy whose expression he couldn't read before feeling the smoke rush down his throat and into his lungs. It felt horrible and sent him into a coughing fit, but the sounds of his coughs were drowned out by Billy's laughter, and soon Steve's too. He attempted to finish the cigarette, but he just couldn't stop coughing so soon enough he just called it quits. The two of them grabbed some more drinks from inside before heading down the back yard. They'd gotten about half way down when Billy stopped and

flopped to the ground. They were far away enough from the party that they could hear each other talk and have space, but close enough that everyone could still see them. Steve laid on the ground next to Billy and stared up at the sky.

"You know I still haven't forgiven you right?" Steve muttered.

"For what?" Billy asked, voice husky from all the booze and smoke.

"For beating the shit out of me."

"Oh well, you deserved that one." Billy chuckled to himself. "You were being a dick."

"Explains why you're always bruised up then." Steve joked but Billy said nothing, eyes glued to the stars. They were both quiet for a moment, the older boy slightly scared to speak in case he set something off in Billy. Despite what a complete ass he knew the boy was, surprisingly he was having a good time with Billy. The younger opened his mouth to speak eventually.

"Harrington, does your-" The shrill voice of a girl calling out Steve's name interrupted him and the two sat up.

"Steve, there you are I've been looking- oh. You're with Billy." Nancy said, uncertainty clear in her voice.

"Yeah, I mean, we're just chilling out."

"Why does it matter to you princess?" Billy asked as he sipped out of his beer can, Steve sniggered.

"I was just wondering if Steve was okay, *actually*." She snapped, eyes like daggers.

"Well honey, fuck off back inside and leave us alone." He replied, eyes equally venomous.

"Wha- Excuse me? Steve, you're not gonna let him talk to me like this are you?" Nancy genuinely looked offended, eyes begging Steve to stand up for her. His sober self would've done so in a heartbeat but drunk him? He found it funny.

"Go ask Jonathan to stand up for you, you're not my girlfriend anymore." Barked Steve, causing Billy to let out a sinister laugh. Nancy had never looked so insulted in her life, sourness was etched in stone on her face, but Steve couldn't help but snigger as she stormed off. He looked back over at Billy who had the biggest grin on his face. He couldn't help but admit that talking to Nancy like that was beyond satisfying, ever since she broke it off with him he'd been nothing but kind and polite; his feelings still controlling his actions, but this helped him let off some steam. He was never one to hold leverage over another person, but she had no right to be mad at him for long, after all, she had said much worse last time she was drunk. He flopped back onto the grass, eyes glued to the stars that shone above.

"Is it weird that I like chilling with you?" Steve asked. He couldn't see but Billy raised a brow.

"Maybe just a bit." He replied, a slight trace of humour present in his voice.

"Well I don't care. I do, you're a pretty chill guy when you're not being an ass."

"I guess I could say the same to you." Steve sat up again at the words, surprisingly Billy with his very sudden movements and held out his hand.

"Friends?" Billy sat up also and shook Steve's hand, with the smallest smile present.

"Friends."

The weekend had been one continuously hideous hangover that Steve feared would never pass. But by Monday surely enough, the hangover had passed, and he felt just peachy. His morning went by just fine, the usual half listening in class and small talk with his class mates went by in a breeze. It wasn't until lunch that Nancy decided to bring unnecessary stress into his life. He was placing his books into his locker when she stomped over to him.

"What the hell was that the other night?" She demanded, arms

crossed and a face full of fury.

"I was drunk Nancy." He stated, to be completely honest, he didn't remember their interaction much. All he remembered was being mean and laughing with Billy as she stomped off back to the house.

"That's hardly an excuse. You were sat with *him* and just being so horrid!" The hurt was apparent in her eyes which sent a horrible pang of guilt through him, making him want to beg on his knees for forgiveness but he refused to give in. He knew that if he was to get over Nancy anytime soon then he needed to stop letting her walk all over him.

"Look Nancy, we just broke up. I don't need you babying me all the time, just let me breathe okay?" She didn't say anything in reply. "You have no ground to talk anyway, last party I went to you got absolutely trashed and told me our whole relationship is bullshit. I think you need to realise that it's not all the things around you that are bullshit. You're the only bullshit in Hawkins." He might as well have killed her new kitten with the face she was pulling, tears brimming at her eyes. He had no idea where the outburst had come from, but to get it off his chest made him feel so good. She turned on her heels and practically ran down the hallway, probably off to find Jonathan. He ran his fingers through his hair and let out a stressed moan, annoyance filling his whole being. What gave her the right to tell him off for stuff? But on the other hand, what gave him the right to be a dick. He rolled his eyes at himself before storming off towards the canteen, hoping that some food might chill him out. After he grabbed some food his eyes scanned the tables, looking for a spot that wasn't next to someone who could irritate him beyond belief. It was a minute or so before he noted Billy sat alone digging into a sandwich. He took a breath and headed over to the table. The two hadn't interacted since the party, Steve couldn't even remember how they had parted ways, but he hoped the friendship agreement still stood. He forced a smile to his face as he approached the table, Billy staring up at him like he'd been interrupted.

"Is it chill if I sit with you? Everyone at this school is getting on my last nerve." Billy didn't say anything, merely making a gesture for Steve to sit down, so he did. He nibbled away at his food awkwardly, neither saying anything at all until Billy broke the silence.

"Did the princess give you grief?" he asked curiously.

"Wha- How'd you-? Yeah. It didn't end very well."

"You tell her to fuck off yet?"

"I mean, kinda." Steve rubbed the back of his neck awkwardly. Billy only nodded in approval as a response and the two fell back into a silence. Sober Steve had no idea what to say to Billy, the fear of setting him off still present. When the two were done eating Billy pulled on his denim jacket and took out his pack of cigarettes, he slotted one behind his ear before offering the pack to Steve. He had half a mind to reject the offer, but he took one anyway. The offering of a cigarette seemed to be Billy's peace offering and Steve wanted them to be okay. The two headed outside and sat on a bench out looking onto the field. Steve coughed and choked on the smoke again just as he did the other night, once again causing Billy to laugh. Smiling really did suit the blonde boy. They spoke about basketball for a while, Billy offering genuine tips to the older boy. It turns out Billy was really into sport, working out every day, running every morning and he used to play for his school team back in California. They spent the entirety of lunch out there, just talking about absolutely nothing until the shrill ring of the bell interrupted them. They stood and began to head inside, just before they parted ways Steve turned to say.

"Uh, do you wanna help me babysit tonight?"

3. What doesn't kill you makes you wish you

He couldn't tell what hurt more, the forceful backhand or the way his head hit the wall in reaction. Either way his head throbbed. It took every ounce of willpower to not show the pain, to keep a blank face and just wait it out. Usually his father stopped after a couple punches when Billy was silent, then he'd stomp out of his room, leaving Billy an opportunity to let go of the tears that rested in his eyes. Neil didn't seem to stop this time though, instead of throwing a punch to the face the pummel hit his stomach, completely winding him. Billy let out a small cry, cursing himself to hell and back for showing such weakness to his father. A tight hand wrapped itself around his neck and shoved him against the wall, whacking his head again. He couldn't breathe. No matter how hard he tried to suck the air into his lungs barely any passed the tight grasp on his throat. He didn't know what to do, *he could not breathe*. The room around him started to look ever so distorted as he became more light headed, hands rushed to his father's clawing at it to loosen its grip even the tiniest bit. He knew he shouldn't fight back, fighting back was the ultimate way to end up in the hospital but the fear that his father would take the violence a step too far was too prominent.

"You will *never* disrespect me like that ever again. Do you understand?" His father growled. There was such a darkness in his eyes, it was terrifying, like an animal's. Steve tried to speak, he was so desperate to just apologise in hopes that it would satisfy his father enough to leave him alone, but he physically couldn't get the words out. After the apparent attempt to talk Neil loosened his grip ever so slightly, allowing Billy to let out a weak 'Yes sir, sorry sir'. At the words Neil let go and Billy fell to the ground. He couldn't even look up at his father as he stormed out the room, slamming the door in a way that Billy felt his walls shake ever so slightly. The blonde buried his face in his hands, completely unable to stop the tears that fell from his eyes, his whole body ached as silent sobs rattled through him. He felt so helpless and pathetic, he was a 17-year-old guy for goodness sake and there he was, curled up in his room crying like some kind of pussy. Maybe his father was right when he called Billy 'a pathetic waste of space'. After all, he couldn't even keep himself together after a couple hits.

He didn't know how long he'd been sat there crying, it could've been a mere ten minutes or several hours, he had no idea at all, but a hesitant knock at the door pulled him from his thoughts. He wiped his tears hastily, refusing to let whoever was at the door know he'd been crying. He shot up and swung it open.

"What?" He snapped.

"It's six thirty, it's time to go." She said. It was clear from her expression that she knew something had happened with his father, but he was thankful she didn't ask him about it. Instead he just silently nodded and followed her out to the car.

Steve lounged on Dustin's couch anxiously as he waited. Billy had said yes to babysitting with him and that he would come along with Max. All of the boys sat on the floor, eyes glued to the TV as they waited for their friend to arrive, they refused to start a game of Dungeons and Dragons without her. Steve hadn't told them that Billy was coming round, he knew it'd set them on edge and he just didn't know how to tell them.

"Um, guys, so, I Kinda invited a friend to come over and chill with us." He said, all rooms in the room turning on him curiously.

"Who?" asked Will. Steve was still really hesitant to say.

"Its- uh, it's Billy." He braced himself for their reactions. They all stared at him wide eyed.

"Why the hell would you invite him here?!" Mike exclaimed.

"He tried to kill me!" Lucas yelled. Steve really didn't know what to do. He didn't want to cancel on Billy, he genuinely wanted to hang out with the guy but then, he didn't want to upset the kids, after all it wasn't even his house.

"Look guys, I promise that he'll be okay. We'll stay in here whilst you're playing your game if you want us to?"

They didn't like the idea, but no one argued with Steve any further, accepting the fact that Billy would in fact be coming to the house. The air was heavy as they all waited anxiously for the sound of the

doorbell and soon enough. It rang. Steve shot up embarrassingly fast, glancing down at the kids as he approached the door, hoping they weren't looking at him funny and thankfully none of them were. Max grinned up at Steve as he swung the door open. Billy stood behind his step-sister, an unreadable expression on his face.

"Hey, come inside." Steve said, Max brushed past him and ran to the other boys who greeted her excitedly. Billy entered the house hesitantly, discomfort clear on his face. He smiled awkwardly for a moment before speaking.

"I uh, brought a six pack of beer." Steve couldn't help but notice how hoarse Billy's voice sounded but he brushed the thought to one side, distinctly remembering Billy telling him to stay out of his business.

"Awesome, I'll show you where the fridge is." Steve felt overly happy in this situation, as if he was trying to compensate for Billy's lack of energy, he mentally slapped himself as the blonde followed him to the kitchen. He needed to chill out, show Billy that he was a cool guy, someone he could hang out with. He didn't know why he wanted to come across that way to Billy, in fact he didn't know why any of this was happening with Billy, surely he was supposed to hate him? After removing two cans from the plastic rings, Steve placed the beers into the fridge and cracked open his. He sipped on it nervously as he glanced up at Billy. The blonde still did not look comfortable in the environment, eyes averted from Steve as he kept them locked on his can.

"Is it weird that I invited you?" inquired Steve, the awkwardness of the whole situation sinking into every single pore on his body. Billy let out a breathy chuckle before glancing up at the older boy.

"Nah, its fine Harrington, just one of those days, y'know?" Once again Steve didn't pry, as much as he wanted to, he knew that Billy liked to keep to himself. The two headed into the living room where Steve slumped back down onto the sofa. The kids were all still on the ground, eyes staring up at Billy who kept his eyes to his feet.

"You can sit down you know Hargrove." Steve said, attempting to make light of the younger's awkwardness. Eyes stayed glued on Billy as he approached the couch and sat down next to Steve, keeping a

distance between them. No one said a word.

"Alright, you lot get out." Steve moaned, hands gesturing for the kids to move rooms.

"What? Why?" Dustin argued.

"Because one, I want to watch tv and two because your creepy staring is freaking *me* out." He announced. Dustin looked like he was about to retaliate but Steve shot him a look, nodding his head ever so slightly towards Billy in hopes they got the message and thankfully they did. After all the kids had gone off to play D and D, Steve turned to Billy.

"TV or Records?" he asked. Billy pondered for a second before replying.

"Records, what is there?"

"I mean, it's not my house but I'm sure there's something listenable." Chuckled Steve. The two approached the shelf with all the records slotted in before the two began to riffle through. It was a couple minutes before Billy pulled one out excitedly.

"I love this record! Jesus, I haven't listened to it in ages!" Billy rushed over and set up the record and let the music flood through the room. The fast strumming of a guitar and vocals filled the room and Steve recognised it in a heartbeat.

"This is Rumours by Fleetwood Mac, this is literally my favourite album!" He said excitedly. Billy smiled at him as he tapped his foot to the beat.

"I remember saving up for it when I was eleven, I heard Gold Dust Woman on the radio and knew I had to have it. I would steal coins out of my mom's purse and from down the back of the couch, it took me like a couple months until I could afford it." There was a sad smile across his lips which Steve just couldn't tear his eyes from. Steve didn't question the sadness, instead he decided to add his own funny story.

"I remember getting really drunk at a party and trying to serenade a

girl with Rhiannon, that was embarrassing. The whole party literally laughed me out of the house." Billy's chuckle led to them moving on to tell each other their favourite party memories, Steve sat on the sofa gazing down at Billy who sat cross legged on the floor, looking more relaxed than Steve had ever seen him. Time seemed to completely escape them, and it wasn't long until Dustin and Max appeared in the room complaining that they were hungry. Fuck, Steve had completely forgotten about the kids, let alone sorting out food, the fact that Ms. Henderson had asked him to feed the brats had slipped from his mind.

"It's cool, I'll order a couple pizzas, I'm kinda hungry too." Billy offered. From the kid's expressions Billy might as well have told them he was taking them all to Disney land.

"Why?" Max questioned, reluctant to believe her Step-brother could have such a generous offer. He glared at her before raising a hand to mimic batting her away.

"Shut up Max." He half expected her to storm off in a huff like she usually did but instead a foreign giggle left her, or well, at least it was foreign to him. Billy's words were enough confirmation for the two to run back into the other room, raving about how Billy was about to buy them all pizza. Billy shot up and headed for the landline.

"What'd you like Harrington?" he called from the kitchen.

"Meat!" He shouted back.

"*Of course* Steve Harrington likes a good bit of meat!" Billy hollered back followed by a cackle. With a grin Steve advanced into the kitchen and playfully pushed Billy from behind.

"Hey, what was that?" Billy turned with a thunderous look on his face which instantly sent regret through the older boy. A second passed before Steve found himself in a headlock, panic filled him before he realised it wasn't tight and Billy was laughing.

"Want round two Harrington?" He joked. Steve heartily fought against Billy, managing to wriggle free.

"I would say yes but my boxing coach said I should save my efforts for real opponents, you know?" he jested. Billy smiled before turning back to the phone.

"Anyway, fuck off, I need to order this food."

The beatings were getting worse and more frequent. Billy used to only get hit if he did something wrong however now it seemed more like a routine. It didn't matter if Billy stayed out all night, not returning to the early hours, his father always made time to slap him around, whether he waited up for him or if it was in the morning. Billy had no idea why his dad had gotten so violent lately, he just wanted to barricade his room and never leave but he knew that his dad would find a way in. He always did. The longer it took for him to do so, the more pissed he became. Billy took the week out of school, usually his beatings were never evident, not unless he stripped but he was sporting a rather dark black eye and split lip which he knew would raise questions. It wasn't too far fetched for Billy to just say he got into a fight, but it was too much effort to keep up with the lies, it was easier to explain that he skipped out because he wanted to than to create some kind of fake fight. Max seemed to be hovering around him much more than usual, he still drove and picked her up from school, his father would just have more reason to hit him if he didn't. When Neil wasn't home and Billy found himself slumped on the sofa, Max always seemed to be sat on the other side. She never really said anything to him, but her presence this often was something Billy definitely was not used to.

That particular night, Neil was screaming into his son's face about something petty like Billy leaving his jacket on the couch. Of course, the boy had uttered his apologies, but apologies seemed to mean nothing to Neil anymore, he couldn't leave Billy's room unless he'd rendered the boy semi-broken. After a couple punches to the cheek, nose and temple, Billy was starting to get dizzy. At this point Billy was surprised his skull hadn't shattered into a million pieces a long time ago. Neil readied himself for one more punch when something odd consumed Billy, a surge of courage, or stupidity, however one would conceive it, but he pushed his father back with all his might.

"Get the fuck off me!" He yelled. The look on Neil's face terrified Billy to his very core, it was almost demonic the way his eyes bore into his

son with such a rage. Billy had no idea what it was but he felt something heavy and blunt whack into his head just above his temple. He fell to the ground and the pain radiated through his whole body, he felt a warm thick wetness trickling down his face which made his stomach churn. He looked up at his father who held some old trophy that Billy had won as a kid, what a prize it turned out to be. In his disorientated state he managed to clamber to his feet desperately, he'd never run like he did past his father and out the front door. He'd only grabbed a hoodie from the coat hangers, not even having the chance to grab his car keys, he sprinted out onto the street where the rain pattered down violently whilst his father angrily called after him.

He didn't know how long he ran for, he ran until his lungs looked like they were about to collapse. Pain was all he could think about, the throbbing pain of the entirety of his head, the ache in his lungs, the sting of healing ribs. He was a mess. Billy was drenched when he approached a nearby bus stop, with no bench under the small shelter he sunk to the floor where he finally let himself cry. Billy Hargrove would never admit it aloud, but he was scared. So fucking scared. Scared of what his father would do to him next time he came home, or scared of his father coming in search and finding him, scared that this would never end, and Billy would forever be stuck in his hideous routine of pain until his father eventually took it too far. He just wanted to disappear into complete nothingness, just remove himself from existence because maybe then it just wouldn't hurt so damn much.

Steve could barely hear the radio over the sound of the rain hitting his windscreen. His wipers were swiping as fast as they could but, yet Steve was still more or less blinded as he drove. The week had been slow. Nancy was still giving him the silent treatment and subsequently so was Jonathan which wouldn't've been a problem if Billy had actually turned up for school. He hadn't seen the younger since that night they babysat and a small part of him wondered if Billy's absence had anything to do with him. They had gotten on right? It was completely crazy that Steve didn't think of calling Billy an asshole once and that he'd genuinely had a fun time with the other guy, just stuffing their faces and listening to their favourite records. Billy had even said he'd do it again as he stood under the doorframe,

leading Max towards the car, the prospect of hanging out with the Californian boy had excited Steve which only led to disappointment when Billy was a complete no show at school. Steve had even tried to question Max on Billy's whereabouts, but she usually just shrugged her shoulders or simply left it at 'He's not well.' After a couple days, he just stopped asking, assuming that hanging out with Billy was short lived and over now.

The rain was dropping an entire ocean to the ground, the roads were practically flooded with rainwater, he was certain he'd heard some thunder in the background. He drove slow, not trusting his visibility, he point blank refused to damage his car in anyway, his car was way too precious to him. He had just dropped Dustin home after picking him up from the arcade, It was a Friday, meaning there must be some party going on, or at least something fun to do. Steve silently cursed himself because of course he wasn't invited to anything, he didn't really have any friends, not anymore. He just simply ran around following a bunch of kids, hoping that their demands would occupy his time. How sad was that? Steve was nearing his house when he drove past the bus stop. He drove past it everyday and it was not special in the slightest but for some reason that day his eyes were drawn to it, that day he noticed the figure hunched up in the corner. Whoever it was, they were probably waiting for the rain to let up, it was too late for the buses to be running. It was no skin off his nose if he gave whoever it was a lift, he couldn't imagine being stuck out in this rain. He stopped the car before pulling his jacket over his head and running towards the shelter, leaving his engine still running.

"Hey, do you want a lift somewhere? I don't think there's anymore buses ton-" The figure looked up at Steve and he completely lost his train of thought. There was so much blood. "Billy? Are you- what happened?" Billy shot up onto two feet, anger apparent on his features.

"Get back in the car and fuck off Harrington." He ordered. Steve was confused. Not only had he found Billy bloodied and bruised after a week of no interaction but he was back to being aggressive.

"You need a hospital, come on, I'll drive you." Steve offered, hoping it would defuse the situation. Just like he had done their first fight, Billy shoved Steve, sending the lankier boy to the ground, getting

absolutely drenched in the rain.

"What the fuck? I'm trying to help?" that crazy laugh he hated so much escaped Billy's lips as he looked down at him.

"I don't need your fucking help Harrington! You've always gotta stick that damn nose of yours into other people's business don't you! Have you not got anything better to do with your pathetic life?" Billy yelled angrily. He looked like he wanted to hit Steve who was still on the ground, but the punch never came which surprised the now drenched brunette. It was in that second that Steve realised Billy had not changed in the slightest, Billy didn't wanna be his friend, Billy still hated him. Steve had been so desperate to find a friend, to find just the slightest bit of accompaniment that he was willing to ignore the fact that Billy was probably the shittiest human being he had ever laid eyes upon. Steve clambered to his feet before snapping back at Billy.

"No, I was just trying to be a decent human being which is clearly something you are clearly incapable of! You are literally the most dislikeable *cunt* I have ever met! You clearly deserved that from whoever had the common sense to beat you up." The words had barely left his mouth when Steve felt himself being slammed against the side of his car, the impact and surprise winded him as he felt Billy's weight pin him down. The rain trickled down off Billy's face that was merely a few inches away from Steve's.

"You say that to me again and I will *kill* you and don't think I won't. I came close before and I'll happily do it again." He spat, his voice completely venomous. Steve completely believed the words, without a doubt knew that Billy was perfectly capable of going that far so he said nothing, simply glaring at him. Billy spat in his face before letting go and sulking off in the rain, leaving Steve wiping spit from his eye angrily. He really fucking hated Billy Hargrove.

Despite the black eyes and cuts, Billy deems it as time to return to school, he couldn't spend another moment cooped up in the house where his father continuously tortured him. So, on the Monday morning he readied himself, attempting to make himself look as presentable as possible with all the bruising. He usually took great pride in his appearance but looking in the mirror made him feel sick,

just seeing how pathetic he looked with the large gash running from his hair line and purple shadowing under his cheekbones. There was nothing he could do to hide it though, so he set off to school with Max in tow, she tried to speak to him as he drove, but he only turned up the radio to drown her out. After dropping her off he drove like maniac towards the high school. Surprisingly he wasn't late however it didn't work for his benefit. Seemingly the whole school was staring at him as he approached the entrance, cigarette hanging from lips. He glared at everyone who even glanced at him for a second, he really was in no mood to even have one of the small town inbreeds to even breathe near him. He stalked down the hallway when his gaze met with one he really didn't want it to. Steve Harrington was glaring back from his locker.

Billy had been completely riddled with guilt from the moment he had left Harrington in the rain. He knew the older boy had just been trying to help, for crying out loud, he didn't even know it was Billy when he pulled over but yet Billy still managed to fuck it up. In any other scenario Billy wouldn't have even lost a wink of sleep but the fact it was Steve filled him with regret. The last couple weeks had been hard for Billy, with how angry his father had been Steve offered an escape that he'd never experienced before. He had to admit that at the party it had never been his intention to hang out with Harrington, in fact he'd approached him in hopes of putting in his place but Steve ended up impressing him, he also turned out to be a pretty decent guy. Not that he didn't know that before, after beating the shit out of Steve he sort of convinced himself that the guy was a complete ass in some way shape or form, he needed some way to justify himself after all. But then when Steve invited him to babysit? At first he thought it was such a stupid idea, he was just going to pretend he was busy or something and just drop Max off but after his dad choking him out, the idea of hanging out with Steve seemed like a form of utopia. But of course, he had to fuck that up.

When Steve had found him he'd been so scared, so hurt, the idea of someone actually giving a shit was just an alien concept because if his own father couldn't care less if he was breathing or not, why the hell would Harrington? But of course Steve let him know his true thoughts, reminding Billy of what a poor excuse of a human being he was. Every word Steve said was completely true, and of course Billy

had to back the statement up with his actions, but it didn't change the fact it hurt. He'd stupidly convinced himself that Steve was some kind of safe space, someone who he could scream, hit and hurt without pure hatred being returned but clearly that was wrong. It was wrong that he even thought that way that he could use people that way but he did. No matter how much he fought with himself about it, his anger was something he could never gain control of. He figured that it was just how he was exactly like his father.

4. IMPORTANT PLEASE READ! (NOT A CHAPTER)

Hey guys! I actually completely forgot that I posted this fic on here so I'm really sorry for the slow updates! I promise you I'm still writing away like a maniac at this story. Thank you so much for your kind reviews! It means the world to me!

I'd just like to say that I rarely use this site anymore and I will actively try and make an effort to remember to post but knowing me, my posts will be so irregular because I'm a messahaha. But if you do want super regular updates, author notes, better formatting, inspiration and playlists, Archive of our Own is where I mainly post. My user is Jiiyongiee and you can find this fic here: </works/12684441/chapters/28921785>

once again im so sorry for forgetting! I'll try better next time!

5. Start over, check again,

Three weeks had passed, and Steve had not interacted with Billy in any other way than harsh glares and violent collisions during basketball practise. He'd ended up going back to Nancy and grovelling for forgiveness after the first week, there was only so many times he could eat on his own at lunch. As per usual he spent his time being the third wheel for Nancy and Jonathan or being Dustin's personal taxi driver. It was a miserable existence, but it was an existence none the less. Sometimes when he was alone he missed the idea of hanging out with Billy, but he was always quick to shoot it down, after all they'd only hung out like three times and it was all bullshit anyway. The interest in where Billy's bruising came from had faded away like a candle blew out and soon he couldn't care in the slightest what kind of fights that the ass was getting into. The sound of sneakers against the gym floor pulled Steve from his thoughts and he quickly ran after his team mates, calling out for the ball. Eventually the ball got thrown in his direction but he didn't hold onto it for long, he felt himself hitting the floor violently, his spine and ribs practically shaking from the impact. He gazed up angrily to see Billy staring back down at him. His face wasn't contorted into its usual sadistic smile, it was simply blank. They stayed that way for a second before Billy offered out his hand, Steve had too much pride to take his hand, so he simply clambered himself up from the floor by himself, marching past Billy. Who did he think he was? That he could treat Steve like such a piece of shit and then act like nothing happened. He refused to put up with it.

After practise he stormed out without taking a shower, his shower at home was perfectly fine and completely Billy free so it seemed like the obvious option. After grabbing his stuff from his locker he got held up by Nancy, chattering on about what Mike and the kids had done the night before, Steve was distant from the conversation, mind racing at why the hell Billy offered to help him up. Soon enough Steve found his escape from the conversation and scampered off to the car park which he really wished he didn't. He could see a familiar blonde mullet leaning against his car, a cloud of smoke drifting away to the sky. He approached his car with a sourness settling in his stomach.

"Get off my car Hargrove." Steve stated in a monotone voice, hoping Billy would clearly read that he was not in the mood for his shit.

"I'm being forced to drop Max off at the arcade later, wanna come?" He asked, eyebrow raised. Steve could not believe him. Billy had told him to fuck off out of his life and nearly beaten him up again and yet here he was, leant against his car, asking him to hang out. Did this guy have a screw loose? Steve didn't need to answer that, he already knew he did. Steve's thoughts must've been clear on his face because Billy spoke up again.

"Look, I was clearly having a shit night the other day. I don't- I don't deal well with people knowing my business y'know?" Steve scoffed.

"If that's your idea of an apology you can go to hell."

"You want me to apologize?" Billy looked at Steve with distaste which didn't surprise him. He never expected an apology out of Billy, he knew his pride was too strong to give one, didn't mean Steve wouldn't call him out on it.

"Well yeah, you threatened to kill me because I offered you a lift from the rain. I'm clearly the asshole here, you're right Billy." The blonde rolled his eyes.

"I don't do apologies."

"Well that solves that issue then didn't it?" Steve pushed his way past Billy and started to unlock his door. "I'll see you around Hargrove." Billy forced the door back shut as Steve attempted to climb inside.

"Oh, come one Harrington, stop being such a *princess*! Look, just come tonight, I swear I'll tone down the asshole." Billy was basically grovelling at this point which made Steve feel just a tad smug. It wasn't till that moment Steve realised how close they were, faces barely inches apart. Steve could smell the cigarette smoke on Billy's breath as blue eyes bore into brown. It was like being hypnotised by the younger man, with each second Steve found it harder and harder to be begrudging against Billy, he pulled away from the stare with a defeated sigh.

"Oh, fuck it. I'll see you at six." Not looking back to see Billy's smug expression, Steve clambered into his car aggressively before pulling away at speed.

Steve tapped his foot impatiently as he waited for Billy's arrival. The nights had started to warm up meaning that Steve could lean against the exterior of his car with only a thin jacket but yet he still shivered ever so slightly. Dustin had already run inside with the others, Steve assumed that if he was heading to the arcade anyway, it'd be worth giving the kid a lift, at least that way Steve could slightly justify why he'd bothered to even drive to the arcade. Billy's car could be heard long before it was even seen, the heavy drumming from some metal band Steve didn't know poured from the rolled down windows at a deafening volume. Billy's breaks squeaked as he abruptly stopped, smirking up at Steve from the driver seat. Max slid out from the car quickly and run off, calling back a thank you or something or other, Steve didn't really pay attention to it.

"So what've you got planned Hargrove?" Steve asked, crossing his arms as he stared down at the blonde. The Californian boy shrugged lazily.

"No idea, didn't think you'd show. Let's go for a drive." With a roll of his eyes Steve walked round to the passenger side and slid inside. His eyes kept on Billy's as he lit a cigarette, his eyes were glued to the way the filter balanced so elegantly on the tip of Billy's lips. He hadn't realised he was staring till a quiet chuckle brought him from his thoughts.

"Did you want one or..?" Billy didn't follow his word with a usual sarcastic comment which Steve found strange, it was as if the lack of one insult had avalanched an atmosphere of seriousness around them. With a shake of the head from Steve, Billy pulled away with a screech of his tires. It wasn't until he was actually in Billy's car that he realised just how fast the other drove, he found himself clutching the door handle in a false sense of security.

"So, uh, where are we actually going." Questioned the brunette.

"Honestly, I don't know."

"Why did you ask me to come out Billy?" It just seemed too much as if Billy had an ulterior motive, there was no point in the two just driving around, it was a waste of petrol and a waste of their time. There was no response as Billy kept driving on. The radio had been switched off before Steve had gotten in the car, leaving them to a silence neither of them knew how to break.

"I don't know." Admitted Billy.

"It seems you don't know much then." Scoffed Steve. "I'm serious, we don't like each other, why are we hanging out?" Once again, Billy said nothing before the car swerved to the side of the road. The car had pulled into the carpark of some store that had gone out of business years before Billy had even heard of Hawkins, it was empty and admittedly a little bit creepy.

"You don't have any friends do you Harrington?" The question was so abrupt that Steve had no idea how to respond, of course the statement was completely true, if Steve had friends he wouldn't be in this situation at all.

"Of course, I have friends, there's Nancy, Jonathan and-" Billy cut him off.

"Don't bullshit me Harrington, those twelve-year olds are the most excitement you get in a week." Billy paused for a moment. "And the depressing thing is, I think it's the same for me. But at least they *like* you."

"Billy, I-" Cut off again.

"No, let me finish. I need to finish." When he was sure that Steve wasn't going to interrupt him, he continued. "No one in this town likes me, and I get it. I do, trust me. I'm a complete ass."

"You got that right." Steve mumbled, earning a dirty look from the younger.

"I don't want to get into it but I *need* a friend. I'm desperate. I'm gonna go crazy soon, like there's only so much I can deal with and its starting to get too much y'know?" Steve didn't know. Not at all. He

understood the yearning for a friend, after all he felt the same, if he didn't why the hell was he sat in Billy's car in a conceivable murder spot on the edge of Hawkins. What he didn't understand was what seemed to be aggravating the other so much, what did Billy have to 'deal' with exactly?

"So short in short that was your long-winded way of saying, 'I'm sorry Steve, lets be friends'?" the brunette suggested with an eyebrow raised, Billy let out a frustrated sigh.

"Its more complicated than that Harrington."

"Well I have no fucking idea what you're on about Billy! I'm not a psychic!" Billy glared out of his window, fingers pulling another cigarette from the pack. He chewed on his lip for a moment, figuring out what to say next.

"You really don't like me do you Steve?" The use of his first name sent a shiver down Steve's spine, it was so foreign and odd to hear Billy say his name. For a moment he was at a complete loss for words, no idea where this semi-vulnerable Billy had suddenly appeared from. Running a hand through his hair, he turned to the other.

"I want to hate you so bad. You're right when you say you're an ass, especially to me. But no matter how hard I try to force myself to hate you I can't? I end up in shitty situations like this, sitting in your car when I know this is the last place on earth I should want to be. I can't shake that."

Interactions between the two boys had been odd since their drive. They'd been caught in a weird limbo where Billy didn't knock over Steve in basketball, instead he'd pass the ball. At lunch the two sat together at their table before retiring to the back field where Billy could chain smoke. They had babysat together, Billy had even come round to listen to Steve's records. It was weird to say the complete least. After they had settled on the fact they weren't mortal enemies (although it wasn't for lack of effort), it left them in a place where they had to put up with each other. It wasn't like Billy was a different person though, he was still a unbearable dick, at least he was to people who weren't Steve. Of course there were times where Billy would end up angrily throwing something at Steve when they

disagreed on something trivial like what basketball team was better but in general Billy saved his asshole behaviour for people who weren't Steve.

Steve closed his eyes as he laid back on his couch. Billy was meant to be arriving at any moment, hopefully with either booze or food (or both) in hand. Steve's parents had come back and left yet again, leaving the house to whatever he and Billy willed of it which was potentially a dangerous prospect but he didn't think too much into it. The whole situation with the Californian had him confused, he hadn't forgiven the other, his actions were not excused but he saw a bit of himself in Billy. He saw the loneliness that festered like a disease in the core of a person, Steve related to that a lot. He genuinely felt lonely in his life, with no friends and no family around, it was just him but Billy seemed to be patching up that whole in a weird way that he wasn't entirely comfortable with. When the knock came at the door Steve felt that usual flutter of his stomach when Billy was in his presence, it was a weird feeling and he greatly detested it but there was nothing he could do about it. The feeling worsened infinitely when he opened the door. It wasn't odd for Billy to turn up with maybe a scratch or a bruise but standing under the threshold there were seemingly tears in the boy's eyes. Just like that night he'd found Billy at the bus stop there was so much blood, more blood than Steve even knew how to process. Billy wiped his eye before letting out a defeated chuckle.

"Don't suppose you've got a plaster?"

"What the fuck Hargrove, what happened?" Steve exclaimed as he dragged Billy to the nearest bathroom, not bothering to close the front door. Under the harsher lighting Steve could see that the bleeding was coming from somewhere atop his head, his blonde curls were matted with blood.

"Sit. We've gotta stop the bleeding." Commanded Steve as he pushed Billy to sit on the toilet, he grabbed one of his mother's nicer white towels and pressed it against the other's head. A hiss of pain escaped Billy's lips as he grimaced against the impact, but he kept his sullenness. Steve couldn't fathom what situations Billy was getting himself into at all, how the hell could he be this badly injured so frequently? The towel had seemingly turned red all over when Steve

had deemed the bleeding to have stopped enough. Grabbing a flannel and wetting it, he began to delicately trail it over Billy's face, wiping away the blood, sweat and tears that stained his face. Billy's blue eyes drilled into Steve as he cleaned and when he was done eyes met the other, just staring. There was a sense of bewilderment and fear in the blue of Billy's iris, something he'd never seen before.

"What happened?" Whispered Steve, the moment being just so quiet and tense that he couldn't maintain a normal volume. Billy looked reluctant to speak as teary eyes pulled away from their gaze.

"I don't know why I'm acting like such a pussy, he's been doing this my whole life." He muttered but it seemed it was more to himself than to Steve. He didn't think about his actions, he merely acted as his instincts instructed and grabbed Billy's face, turning him to look at him again. Billy's cheek was red hot against Steve's palm which sent a tingle through his veins.

"Billy, you've gotta tell me who did this." Billy didn't pull away from the touch which was stranger than the fact that Steve was touching him in the first place.

"My dad."

"My mom left when I was about Max's age. She was just as bad as my dad. The two of them together treated me like shit. He would hit the both of us and she'd act like it was my fault, although most of the time she was too busy trying to find someone other than my dad to fuck." Steve really didn't like the story that Billy was telling as they sat at opposite sides of the couch.

"Eventually she found someone and ran off with him. My dad got limited to only one punching bag and that is the twisted and unfortunate story of my childhood." Billy stated with a sarcastic smile. Steve couldn't find anything to even falsely smile at. Hearing about Billy's upbringing placed a lot of missing pieces into the puzzle, it explained his injuries, his defensiveness, his behaviour. Steve felt like an asshole for not figuring it out sooner, not that there was anything he could do about it but last week Billy had expressed his need for a friend. It was then that Steve realised he was more than happy to be Billy's friend, if it meant Billy had somewhere safe to

come.

"Stop that Harrington."

"What?"

"Feeling sorry for me. I can see it in your eyes." Billy stated, a finger pointed at Steve half threateningly. Steve sent a sad smile to the other, knowing that sympathy for Billy most certainly would not disappear. They avoided the topic for the rest of the night, Steve doing everything within his capability to not bring up anything family related whilst Billy went on pretending that he had never had his moment of weakness. They found ordered a pizza and watched a VHS of Indiana Jones that Billy had chosen, Steve had seen it a million times already but Billy kept raving on about how they didn't have a VHS at home and how Steve's 'rich ass' could sit down and watch Raiders of the Lost Ark one more time.

"Hey, did you ever realise that we're in Indiana *watching* Indiana?" Billy blurted randomly at one point which only triggered Steve to throw a pillow at him with a snort.

"God, you're such a dumbass." Billy flashed a bright smile which Steve was glad to see. He couldn't fix Billy's problems, the least he could do was try and give him some temporary happiness. Billy had drifted off into a light sleep when the movie credits finally rolled, it was remarkable to see Billy in such a calm and serene state, he looked honestly peaceful. The inner battle of whether to wake up Billy or not consumed Steve as he slid off the sofa. Finally giving into one side he shook Billy's shoulder lightly, the boy groaned in response but didn't open his eyes.

"Hey, there's a spare room upstairs, you can stay there for a couple days if you want?" Offered Steve. He was definitely crossing a boundary now, he and Billy had only been 'friends' for just over a week and here Steve was, offering an invitation to move in, not to mention it was strictly against his parent's rules.

"You sure man? I can drive home." Billy suggested, voice heavy with sleep.

"Don't be stupid. You're not going back there."

Hey, so fun fact: I just had really serious surgery to relocate my lower jaw! I was planning on taking my time off recovering as the perfect time to just write and write at this fic but for some reason my brain is just completely scrambled? like i'm certain i can no longer spell. Anyway, this chapter isn't as long as i'd like it to be and because of my shit fest of a brain, i ended up redrafting and changing the story line like a million times.

But i hope you enjoy it because hopefully i'll be less of a potato soon and get some better content out for you!

Thanks for reading!

p.s if you hadn't realised each chapter is named after a Bring Me the Horizon lyric bc like all the lyrics relate to Billy a painful amount
xoxoxoxoxoxoxo

6. We're all Fucked in the Head

Never before in his life had Billy felt that safe. As he climbed under the cool sheets of Steve's guest room he felt entirely secure, like nothing there could harm him. It was one of the deepest sleeps he'd ever had, probably due to a concussion but Billy placed it under the safe environment. He woke up to the smell of left pizza and coffee floating through the house, he had no idea what time it was, or what day for that matter, all he knew is that the growling of his stomach wanted to go exactly where that smell was originating from. Steve was in a state of undress as he sipped at a cup of coffee, merely wearing a shirt and boxers. His hair was a complete mess, a style that most certainly would never be seen by anyone outside of this house. He watched as Steve nibbled at a left-over slice of pizza, staring off into space.

"Good morning princess. I see you've prepared a feast." Billy joked as he grabbed a slice. Steve jumped as he was pulled from his thoughts, letting out an embarrassed chuckle.

"There's no food in the house, thought I'd put the left overs to good use." Steve shrugged, a small blush present on his cheeks. Billy couldn't help but appreciate the sight before him, just in that moment Steve looked so good in his messy appearance. The blonde smiled to himself as he grabbed another slice of pizza, taking a massive bite.

"I was serious about what I said last night." Steve announced, the statement had seemed random, especially when the two had been so contempt in their silence. "That you can stay here for as long as my parents are away." Billy blinked at Steve. He wanted to jump to the conclusion that Steve must've had an ulterior motive, a reason to keep Billy at his home that would ultimately end badly but he swatted the thoughts away. Steve was a nice guy. It was unquestioned, it must've been a genuine offer. To be able to stay away from his father, even if it was just a small while seemed like a utopian concept so to say the offer made him happy was an understatement. He was ecstatic to be able to stay with Steve in his big house, hell he might even use the pool. He had no idea how to express that gratitude to the other boy though, he'd never been good

at showing how he truly felt, usually he just resorted back to being his asshole self but he knew that in the current situation that wasn't even an option.

"Thanks man. I'll try and stay out of your hair." Steve seemed content with the response as he finished off his coffee.

"Cool. I'm gonna grab a shower and get dressed. You can borrow some of my clothes and then we can go grab your stuff while your dads at work?" Suggested Steve. Billy agreed to the proposal and Steve headed back upstairs, leaving the blonde to his own devices. He simply stood there munching away at the remains of the pizza before he heard the sound of water coming from upstairs. It was odd to think that this was temporarily his new home. He took the opportunity to being alone to explore a little, he'd been in the house many times but most of the doors had been closed, presenting no availability to be snooped in but now was his chance. The house wasn't too exciting, just plainly decorated rooms, the only impressiveness was the quantity of rooms. After his nose had been stuck through every doorframe, Billy headed to his room to change. Steve had laid out a white t-shirt and some underwear for him which looked intimidatingly small. Billy's suspicions were correct when he pulled the shirt over his head to see that it clung, it really clung. There wasn't a muscle or contour that wasn't visible through the fabric. The blonde almost laughed at himself as he looked in the mirror, he was all for showing off his abs, but this just looked like he'd been shopping in the kids department. Steve seemed to share the same thought as his laughter came from the doorway, dressed and ready after his shower.

Living with Billy hadn't been as difficult as first anticipated. Steve had expected the house to turn into a complete mess, have girls over every night, to argue with Billy at every opportunity but the blonde had been very courteous. Of course there were nights where he'd hear Billy finally come home in the early hours, coming back from a date with some girl or something but in general, they just laid around and watched TV like slob. Steve was really enjoying the experience, he no longer dreaded the idea of coming home from school, instead he was excited to chill out with Billy, the impending feeling of loneliness no longer hanging over him. They still drove in separate cars to

school, partially to avoid any raised brows but also due to the fact that Billy was particularly clingy to his Camaro and Steve's fear of the reckless driving of it. Life seemed to be looking ever so slightly uphill for Steve, he even found himself getting over Nancy. He was in a place where he no longer wanted to bend to her will or push her away, subsequently their friendship was so much better. Better enough for him to invite her round.

Billy was out which meant Steve didn't have to explain the whole situation, not yet at least. He sat in the front room with Nancy while she chatted on about something that happened at school. Steve found it a fulfilling experience, after all, his ex was sitting in his house, completely alone with him and yet he felt no urge to even touch her. All their chemistry was gone, and he was glad just to be her friend. They stayed that way for a couple hours, just laughing with each other when the sound of the front door opening took them off guard. Steve knew who it was immediately and settled down, Nancy however seemed tense.

"I thought your parents aren't back for a while?" She whispered, clearly concerned about whatever intruder had made their way into the house. Before Steve could even answer Billy turned the corner into the room, only to stop in his tracks.

"Hey Harrington, I'm thinking Chinese food to- oh. Nancy's here." Steve couldn't read Billy's expression as he stood in the threshold. There was something off about it.

"Uh yeah- I invited her to hang, you can come join us?" Steve offered, feeling the uncomfortable awkwardness of the situation.

"Steve, I can go?" Nancy suggested, starting to move from the couch.

"No!" he exclaimed "I mean, there's no reason for you to go." Nancy seemed to accept this and sunk back into her seat, eyes glancing from Steve to Billy curiously.

"I'll go- uh- upstairs, just call for me when you want food." Billy managed to get out before turning on his heel and half storming off up the stairs. There was a moment of quiet as they listened to Billy's footsteps ascending up the stairs before Nancy blurted out the

question she so desperately wanted to ask.

"What the hell is he doing here?!"

"Well, he's kinda staying with me for a while." He knew that it was hardly an explanation, but he was sure Billy would not be too happy with his dirty laundry being aired so he remained ambiguous.

"What? That doesn't even make sense! He nearly killed you!" Nancy exclaimed quietly.

"Look Nancy, I can't tell you what happened, it's not my place. He needs somewhere, and I have an empty house. It's good for both of us." Steve said with a sigh, hoping desperately that Nancy would pry no further like she usually did.

"This is weird Steve."

"Oh trust me, I *know*."

Nancy stayed for a little over than an hour longer. Jonathan had swung by to pick her up, Steve was pretty certain he'd have a couple questions about the Camaro in the drive way but that was an issue for another day. Apart from the tension that had originated from Billy's arrival home, seeing Nancy had been relaxing, something he really needed. Not only could he find a friend in Billy, but he could lean on Nancy again too. Feeling bad that Billy had cooped himself up, he headed upstairs to coax the blonde out with the offer of food. Billy was sat on the floor of not his own room but Steve's; he noticed the record player spinning around a vinyl which lead up to the headphones placed upon Billy's head. When Steve entered the room, Billy's eyes looked up to his and removed the music from his ears.

"She's gone so you can come out of hiding now." Steve joked.

"I'm not hiding. I just didn't wanna get in the way." Billy offered with a lazy shrug.

"In the way of what? We were just talking."

"You don't have to play dumb Harrington, trying to get back with your ex isn't that embarrassing, although, I'm sure there's plenty other

girls at school who'd happily lay on their back for you." He said with a smirk. Billy rose to his feet and approached Steve who was gazing quizzically at him. "I can call a few for you if you want?"

"Wha- No? I'm not trying to get laid?" Steve didn't understand what had given Billy the impression he was trying to get back with Nancy, after all the way there was at least like 3ft. between them as they sat was clearly an indication otherwise. Billy was smiling as he brushed past Steve, finding the expression on his face funny.

"I'm gonna call and order food? What'd you want princess?" and with that Billy left the room. Leaving Steve completely stunned.

The food place wasn't running delivery meaning that Billy had to drive out and collect, which as annoying as it was resulted well because Billy also returned with beer in tow. Steve had no idea how Billy got served alcohol, he probably just sweet talked the cashiers or something, but it wasn't worth thinking about because it meant they could get drunk. The two wolfed down their food, leaving barely any scraps behind, clearly hungered by their long days at school. Billy riffled through the vinyl's as Steve cracked open his first beer.

"And Billy's music choice of the evening will be..." Steve began to aggressively slap a drumroll onto the carpet as Billy laughed; the blonde slipped the record from its cardboard casing before delicately setting it up. Steve waited in anticipation for the music to start, he had no idea why he loved it so much when Billy chose a record, he just knew he always enjoyed his choice. Soon enough the familiar sound of guitar filled the room.

"And its Pink Floyd!" Billy jokingly took a bow before sliding onto the floor next to Steve. The brunette couldn't help but notice how warm Billy's shoulder was against him, it almost burned to touch. Billy opened up a beer of his own and the two of them knocked their cans against each other, spilling some of it onto their clothes before yelling out a 'Cheers'.

As they drank Billy found himself talking about some of his old antics, telling Steve about how he'd been arrested for arson once because he set fire to some dumpsters behind a liquor store. Billy's life sounded way more exciting than Steve's he thought, well,

excluding the monsters and other dimensions. The Californian seemed to have story upon story that entertained Steve to every degree and he didn't know how he managed to do so many fun and reckless things, all Steve did to rebel was drink and let people sleep at his house. They were several beers in when Steve felt a weight on his shoulder and his heart practically stopped as he felt hair brush against his bare neck. He turned ever so slightly to see that Billy had leant his head upon his shoulder as he kept on talking. Steve went straight into a panic. Why the hell was Billy Hargrove leaning on his shoulder? What did it mean? Was he drunk? Was it even weird? Maybe it wasn't weird for guys to do that in California. Steve could barely concentrate on Billy's words as he spoke, too caught up in the meaning behind the contact.

"Steve?" Billy's voice brought Steve straight out of his thoughts, forcing Steve to focus in on Billy's blue eyes that stared at him. Steve missed the warmth against his neck almost immediately, yearning for Billy to place his head back there.

"Yeah?" He croaked out, barely able to find his words. Billy was so damn close to his face, so close. He could feel Billy's breath on his lips, his eyes trailed down to the other's lips, noting how plump and slick they looked.

"I asked you a question." Billy breathed out, the warmth behind each word being felt on Steve's bottom lip. He knew he should pull away. That's what any ordinary guy would do, just pull back or push Billy away but he didn't, he was so painfully still. There was clearly a strong part of him that just wanted to see what would happen next.

"Ask again." The atmosphere was heavy as it weighed down on Steve's chest, Billy wasn't moving, nor was he speaking, leaving him in complete suspense. He was almost scared to breathe in the moment, it was way too quiet. Billy's mouth opened his mouth to speak but no words came, that's when blue eyes shot to the ground. The blonde moved back so he was back to sitting next to Steve.

"Don't worry." He mumbled, his voice ever so slightly breathy. Steve's hand shook ever so slightly as he brought his beer can to his lips, in a state of complete confusion. He cursed himself silently for zoning out, he would've heard the question at least. The curiosity would eat at

him for days, he already knew it was, it was practically killing him already. He decided not to pry, the moment didn't call for it. Maybe he'd ask Billy in a couple days.

Days past and he still didn't ask. It was as if the moment had never occurred, especially with how Billy went about his days as if it had never happened. Something awoke in Steve in that moment, something foreign that left him with an unshakable feeling of discomfort. Just being in proximity of Billy sent him a hideous lightness in his stomach, his chest practically ached from how hard his heart pounded when Billy smiled. Steve found it terrifying that he even felt that way. Deep down he knew what the feeling was, what the cause of all his problems were, but it was something he'd never admit to himself, it was a passing phase so what was the point of dramatizing it all. Steve often told himself he was just getting too excited at the prospect of friendship and projecting all the bad emotions from the breakup onto Billy. That must be it, it had to be. A flick came at Steve's cheek causing him to wince in pain.

"Whats got you thinking so hard?" Billy asked curiously as they sat in the canteen. Steve hadn't realised he had zoned out thinking about Billy which sent a light blush across his cheeks.

"Oh, nothing. I guess I'm tired." Steve mumbled. He felt eyes scanning his food as his own were glued to his food, he hated it when Billy stared him over like that. It was almost predatory the way he analysed every move, forcing Steve into a sense of vulnerability. He knew Billy didn't believe him but it was hardly something to argue about, they both knew when to pick their battles.

"I have a date tonight." Billy announced, Steve looked up at him with a shrug.

"So? you have a date nearly every night."

"Yeah but I kinda need a favour from you." He replied hesitantly. Steve didn't like whatever proposition Billy had for him already. Billy's love life was territory that Steve never dared enter, at first it was purely due to lack of interest. He didn't really care for which girl Billy was trying to lay each night, but Steve couldn't pretend that was the reasoning anymore. There was just something that left a

horrendous nausea in his stomach every time he saw Billy drive off into the evening in a cloud of his own aftershave. Steve couldn't sleep either until he heard the door's latch followed by the sound of Billy's lonesome footsteps.

"I'm seeing Jessica Brown tonight, and she is so fucking hot y'know? The thing is, she won't come on her own. She wants me to bring a friend for her friend." Steve *definitely* did not like where Billy was going.

"You want me to go on a double date with you?" Steve asked, nose turned up and brows furrowed at the idea. Billy looked surprisingly awkward as he let out a small uncomfortable laugh.

"I mean, I don't exactly *want* you to come but, you'd be helping me out. I'd ask someone else but as you noticed, the line of people wanting to be my friend isn't exactly long." Billy's eyes pleaded slightly with Steve, silently coaxing him to say yes. He really didn't want to go, he didn't want to have to watch Billy try and talk his way into bed with some STD ridden cheerleader. On the other hand he really didn't want to say no, he didn't want to sabotage Billy's opportunities to find whatever it was he was actually looking for. He rolled his eyes with a heavy sigh and agreed which only erupted a big smile on Billy's face.

"You owe be big time though!" Steve said firmly with a pointed finger which Billy merely battered away as his other hand tapped at his pockets in search of his cigarettes.

"I'll add it to the list then." Billy replied with a smirk.

Every cell in Steve's body was reluctant to go on the date, he really really despised the idea but there he was, dragging a comb through his hair, perfecting every strand. After double checking Billy was nowhere in sight he grabbed his Farrah Fawcett hairspray from the cabinet and gave his hair four quick sprays. Upon hearing footsteps, he shoved the cannister back away, he knew Billy would never let him hear the end of it if he knew. The younger boy leant against the doorframe with his arms crossed and an eyebrow raised. As he usually looked on a date night, he was sporting a navy button up which defied the name completely as barely any of the buttons were

actually done up. Steve had to admit, Billy looked good. From every strand of hair, to every curvature in his visible muscles Billy looked absolutely amazing.

"Are you actually going out like that?" Billy asked. Steve furrowed his brows, unsure what it was Billy didn't like about his outfit, he personally thought he looked quite good.

"Whats wrong with it?"

"For starters your shirt is untucked, and its buttoned way too high." Billy strode across the bathroom and closed the distance between them. It was half a moment before Steve felt Billy's fingers fiddling with his belt, which stopped all breathing from Steve completely. Once Billy had undone the other's belt and jeans he began to tuck Steve's white shirt under the waist line. The side of the blonde's face was practically pressed against Steve's chest as he tucked in the back. There was no denying that Billy most likely heard how fast the heart was beating in said chest, but he didn't comment. Once the jeans and belt had been done back up, Billy's finger glided up the fabric of the shirt ever so lightly. The quick moving fingers fiddled with a couple buttons until Steve's chest was exposed. His shirt wasn't nearly as undone as Billy's, but he couldn't help but feel exposed, plus his skinny frame was hard to compare against the Californian boy's six pack. The blonde didn't move back when his eyes trailed back up to Steve's.

"You ready to go?" He asked, voice ever so slightly breathy, a sound that made Steve's stomach light. He nodded, not trusting his voice. Billy seemed satisfied with his modifications to Steve's look before he turned on his heel, leading the way towards the front door. They both went in Billy's car, seeing no point in taking both, it meant however that Steve had to brave the terrifying driving and heavy Iron Maiden cassettes. They barely spoke as Billy drove towards some food place, Steve had never been before, but Billy seemed to rave on about the fact that there were pool tables and dart boards.

The two girls were waiting for them inside the restaurant, perched next to each other nervously in a booth. They flashed bright smiles at the sight of Steve and Billy. Steve knew the two of them from school, Jessica was in the cheerleading squad which of course led to her

falling for assholes like Billy all the time. The other girl, his date, was a girl he recognised from his calculus class, Kate wasn't it? Steve forced a smile as he approached the girls and slide onto the opposite side of the booth.

"Hey Billy." Jessica said with a batter of her lashes, god she looked desperate. "Uh Steve, you know Katie right?" Katie, that was it, Steve mentally hit himself for getting the name wrong.

"Of course, Hey, you look pretty tonight." Steve greeted. He wasn't lying, Katie was a really pretty girl, with long brunette hair that fell past her shoulder, chocolatey brown eyes that were framed by such luscious eyelashes. She was such a beautiful girl but Steve didn't know why he was so against sitting across from her. Surely at the sight of a pretty girl he should be all over her, revert back to his old self and try and get her back to his, but he wasn't. Instead he sat there, forcing fake pleasantries as Billy smooth talked his new prey.

"Y'know, Jessica said that Billy was going to bring a friend, but I had no idea it'd be you! It's crazy, I'm on a date with Steve Harrington." She chuckled, Steve could tell she was interested in him. To be quite fair he'd suspected for a long time she had somewhat of a crush on him from the way she always looked at him in class but now he was having to come face to face with it.

"Yeah, I mean Billy sprung it on me today." Steve noticed Billy's eyes turning to him, tuning into the conversation at the sound of his name. Steve slid his hand across the table and held Katie's lightly and playfully before smiling at her. "I'm really glad I came though, couldn't've been set up with anyone more beautiful." Katie's face flushed with a brilliant red as she looked away from Steve, clearly smitten. Steve's eyes drifted to Billy, who didn't even give him a second look as he smiled at Jessica. Steve didn't know why he was so annoyed that his move on Katie hadn't incited any form of reaction from Billy, but it did. He ground his teeth as Jessica jabbered on about some story he couldn't care less for, obviously he laughed when needed and nodded when he needed but the words went in one ear and escaped the other. After a couple Pepsi's and sharing a bowl of fries with the girls, Billy turned to Steve and challenged him to a game of pool which he accepted. The girls followed the two of them as Billy slid a coin in to release the balls. Steve went first, dispersing

all the balls with the stick and looking smugly up at Billy when one rolled into one of the corner pockets.

"Don't get cocky Harrington, you're going to lose miserably." Billy threatened playfully.

"Who's getting cocky here?" Shot back Steve. With a grin and a shake of the head Billy took his turn and as he predicted, he pocketed more of the balls than Steve.

The two were probably more competitive than they should've been but the girls didn't seem to care. They cheered on their designated date when needed, Katie had even excitedly started hugging Steve when he made a good shot. His first instinct was to push her away but on second thought he pulled her closer, allowing his arms to slip down to her lower back. Once again, his eyes turned to Billy whose gaze met his. Billy was looking at him strangely, Steve couldn't place his finger on it but the tiniest bit of satisfaction settled in his stomach, it wasn't the exact reaction he was looking for but it was a reaction nonetheless. They continued to play on, Steve didn't even care that Billy was winning, he felt too smug. It wasn't till near the end of the game that Jessica interrupted them. With a dainty hand placed on Billy's bicep she smiled up at him wantonly.

"I've never played pool before, teach me?" Billy let out a chuckle at the words and agreed. Steve couldn't help but stand there and watch as the blonde wrapped his arms around the girl, showing her how to hold the cue. Steve's stomach churned at the sight. There was something that just infuriated so much to see Billy so intimate with someone else. He tried to listen to Katie chat on, he desperately craved the distraction but his eyes couldn't help but to be drawn to the way Billy would whisper into Jessica's ear, lips slightly grazing across her skin. The sound of her breathy giggles made him see red, he wanted nothing more than to drag her away by her hair. He hated her. He fucking hated her. An arm slid around his waist and pulled him close, it took him a moment to realise it was Katie. In a moment of pure rage he pushed her away.

"Get the fuck off me." He snapped. She looked hurt. He didn't blame her, he was being a complete asshole but he didn't care. He couldn't stand to spend one more moment in that place, one more moment

watching Billy try his hardest to fuck that, that *whore*. He saw how the blonde was staring at him, confusion contorting his features. Steve couldn't do it. In a room where Billy fucking Hargrove stood, Steve was being the asshole. He shook his head before pulling on his jacket, without a look back he stormed out into the night.

Steve deeply regretted coming in the same car as Billy as it now meant he was stuck walking home in the cold. Winter was creeping up quickly and being outside at night was hardly pleasant. His feet stomped against the tarmac as he walked along the road. He had half a mind to stick out his thumb and hitchhike but he couldn't stand to be around anyone in that moment, he had no control over his emotions. What was worse was that he didn't even know why he was so mad. Why should he give two damns that Billy was making moves on some girl, he did it every other night anyway, what was so different now? Nothing. Absolutely nothing was different, they were still the same people, Billy was still an ass and Steve was still an ass in recovery. The anger raged through him like a fire in his core, he hadn't been this angry in such a long time, not since his fight with Billy and even before that, not since his breakup with Nancy. He'd gotten so much better at controlling his anger, he was actually kind of a decent guy now but yet Billy Hargrove got under his skin. Without a second thought Steve slammed his fist into a nearby streetlight, letting out a roar of anger. He was pathetic. He was a *guy*, why the hell should he care about Billy?!

Steve hated that he knew deep down there was more to it, he knew that whatever it was he felt for Billy it was definitely more than a fucking friendship. He'd never even looked twice at a guy before, not once yet here was, getting in a hissy fit because he wasn't getting the attention. Being gay wasn't even an option. It was a small town, no one was gay, it was unheard of. He wasn't gay, he couldn't be. He'd just dated Nancy, and he loved everything about her. She was clearly the complete opposite of a guy, such a slim and small physic, such soft features, she couldn't contrast Billy's burly and muscular body any more.

The walk was thankfully shorter than he expected, soon enough he found himself approaching his front door. He fumbled with the keys for a moment, the cold had spread a numbness through his limbs,

plus his hand was still throbbing from punching that metal pole. He'd barely been inside five minutes when he heard the roar of Billy's Camaro skid into the drive way. Steve didn't want to see him, he didn't want to even recognise his existence in that moment, after all, it was all Billy's fault that he was even feeling this way. He was in the kitchen when he heard the front door slam. Hargrove stormed in, a scowl present on his face and nostrils flared.

"What the fuck was that Harrington?" He yelled, coming uncomfortably close to Steve.

"Nothing just leave me alone." Steve said through gritted teeth. As mad as he was in that moment, he had no interest in getting his face smashed in again.

"No, I won't leave you alone, you just cost me that whole date!" Billy was just as mad as Steve, it was so clear in his eyes. "You acted like a complete jack ass, so Jessica got all protective of her friend and I had to drive the two of them home. She doesn't want anything to fucking do with me."

"I'm sure you can find another lay, you always do." Steve spat.

"What's that supposed to mean huh?" Billy shoved Steve slightly, sending him stumbling back into the fridge. It was enough to ignite all the rage in Steve back up.

"It means, you can go find another whore, I'm sure you've got the numbers of plenty." Billy laughed at the statement. It was the same maniacal laugh that Steve had learnt to be scared of but he wasn't this time. In all honesty Steve believed he was the one to be reckoned with in that moment.

"I don't understand what your problem is Harrington. Are you jealous? Is that what it is?" Steve's stomach sunk at the words. That's exactly what it was. He was jealous, he was jealous of the way Billy wrapped his arms around her, jealous of how he'd hovered so close to her face with that smile of his, jealous of the fact Billy would never in a million years even consider acting that way with him. Of course he'd never voice that, so he stayed silent.

"You're jealous? Jesus, that's a classic. You're getting pissy because I got the hotter chick? You're pathetic Steve." Shouted Billy, a sadistic smile etched on his face. Steve was slightly relieved that Billy read into it wrong and thought he was jealous that he didn't have Jessica, it was safer that way. Whatever Billy thought he couldn't stand looking at him. He hated the reminder that he was a *freak*, he hated how clueless Billy was to all of it.

"Get the fuck out." Steve growled in a low tone. Billy stared at him for a moment, in complete disbelief.

"You're kicking me out?"

"Yeah. I am. *Get out.*" Billy laughed again, but it was different this time. It was breathy, like he was trying to compensate for what was truly going through his head.

"Jesus, now I know why you're a loner." Steve didn't want to hear this. He knew Billy's words were about to sting. "I know why Nancy left you for that fucking freak, why no one at school likes you. You're a slimy piece of shit Steve."

"Stop it." Billy didn't stop though.

"At least I'm upfront about being an asshole but you? You fucking sneak your way in to stab people behind their backs." Steve couldn't even think straight, Billy's words cut deep like knives. He wanted the blonde to shut up so badly, he couldn't hear it. He couldn't hear how much Billy detested him. Despite how angry he was, he never wanted Billy to actually hate him. The anger was too much though, Steve couldn't stop the words that sat at the tip of the tongue. He so desperately wanted to suck them back in but he couldn't.

"No wonder your dad fucking hits you if you talk to him like this."

It was too quick. Billy's right hook pummelled into Steve's jaw, knocking him back into the kitchen counter. He didn't even wait a second to process the punch before he lunged at the younger boy, knocking him to the ground. It was a complete role reversal of the previous fights. This time Steve straddled Billy as he threw punch after punch onto Hargrove's face. The sick thing was, that Billy was

laughing.

"Go on Steve! Hit me like my daddy does!" he yelled between punches. Steve didn't stop at the sight of blood, he didn't stop at the swelling, he didn't stop as Billy made feeble attempts to fight back. He couldn't. He was just so mad, every single harsh word and dirty glare Billy had ever sent him played through his mind, making him really hate him in that moment. Every bad moment flooded his mind, the first time he'd seen the Demogorgon, when Nancy had revealed she didn't love him, when he'd found out she actually did go for Jonathan, entering those damned tunnels, the way his parents constantly left him without a second thought. He was just taking it all out on Billy. He didn't realise that he was crying as he through the hits, his shoulders shook violently as his punches became weaker and weaker till his hands were just resting on Billy's chest. He half expected Billy to either be knocked out or about to retaliate but he just laid there, staring at him. Steve couldn't stop crying, especially when he looked down at Billy's battered face, seeing what he'd done to his supposed friend.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm so sorry, I can't-" he could barely speak through the sobs that ripped through his lungs, he didn't know what the fuck was going on. He didn't understand why he was so mad, why he couldn't stop the anger, most of all he didn't know why Billy wasn't throwing punches back. They stayed that way. Steve sobbing into his bloodied knuckles as the blonde simply laid there.

"It makes you feel better doesn't it?" Billy's voice was so quiet when he spoke, and so soft. Steve had never heard the other sound so soft before. The words confused him, he couldn't fathom that in any shape or form that he felt any better, if anything, he felt worse. "That feeling of being so close to the edge that you've just gotta beat the shit out of something. I know it better than anyone."

"Billy, I just-" Steve could still barely talk, his brain was too scrambled to form even a sentence.

The fury that consumed Billy fought back when Steve was antagonising him, the ass deserved it for acting the way he was. Steve still didn't understand his place and it seemed Billy had to knock him back into it. It wasn't until he was knocked to the ground and Steve

began to relentlessly pummel his face that he submitted. The pain was almost unbearable and the memories the beating brought up were terrifying, it had been a while since he'd fallen victim to his father's blows, he thought he was safe, that he was getting away from it by staying with Steve; but he was wrong. He wanted to demonise the boy who was beating him senseless, he wanted to liken him to his scumbag of a father but when he stared up at the teary-eyed boy, he didn't see his father, he only saw himself. Steve wasn't hitting him for the sake of hitting him like his dad did, he was lost in his rage, like Billy had been thousands of times. He knew exactly what it was like to be in that position where he just had to destroy something, render it completely submissive to his will, so he granted it to Steve.

Something stirred inside of Billy as he stared up at Steve as he cried. The punching had stopped which was a relief for the younger boy, he knew he couldn't take many more, his vision was already starting to go hazy but it wasn't anything he hadn't experienced before. He could see that Steve was ridden with guilt already, part of Billy believed that it was rightly so but another side felt great sympathy. Billy had always been so wrapped up in his own problems, focusing on how shit his own life was that he never really looked into other people's pain, especially not someone like Steve. He was still angry that Steve had ruined his date and tried to kick him out, he found it hard to let shit like that go but he pushed it aside for a moment. He truly felt the need to sort out whatever was going on with Harrington because it clearly ran much deeper than simple date jealousy. Steve was still straddling his lap as Billy hesitantly sat up, weary of Steve going to plant another hit but none came. The blonde couldn't stand the sound of the sobbing, there was something too hard hitting about the sound.

"I fucking let you stay here to get away from that monster. A-a-and here I am, doing the exact same shit." He cried. Billy didn't know what to say, it was true after all. He was surprisingly calm about just being beaten, Billy let out a small laugh when he thought to himself that maybe it was him that needed to be beaten into his place.

"Steve, you're not like my dad at all, chill out." His hands rose to pull Steve's away from his face, forcing Steve to read his expression. "You needed to let the rage out."

"I don't know why I'm so angry Billy." It sounded like Steve was

talking to himself more so than Billy, it was as if he was trying to reason with himself, desperately trying to find some justification for hurting someone like that.

"Sleep it off Harrington, we'll talk about it in the morning." Billy suggested. Steve nodded as he slowly rose to his feet, finally releasing Billy. The blonde had no idea when their roles had switched, shouldn't Billy be the one mid-mental breakdown with Steve talking sense into him? Damn Harrington rubbed off on him too much. Billy also rose to his feet and hesitantly lead Steve up to his room. The brunette clambered into a foetal position as he slipped under the sheets. Billy sunk to the floor next to the bed and simply stayed there.

"Billy?" Steve asked, voice still wobbling ever so slightly.

"Yeah?"

"I'm sorry."

"Yeah, I know."